



No. 16 Australian raven

Description

The Australian raven (*Corvus coronoides*) (Figure 1), is the largest member of the corvid family in Australia and some people call it a 'crow'. Australian ravens are 48-54 centimetres in length and weigh 500-820 grams. They are large, black birds with a long bill and elongated throat feathers (hackles) that are obvious when they call. The call is a drawn-out, falling 'aah-aah-aaaaahhhh'. The eyes change from blue (as a nestling) to brown and finally white, (at three years of age) as they mature. Birds in their first year may appear duller in colour than adults. Juvenile birds also have shorter hackles and pink skin around and in the mouth. The bases of the body feathers are grey rather than the white seen in adults.



Figure 1 Australian raven (*Corvus coronoides*) (Photo: ©K Vang and W Dabrowka www.birdsinbackyards.net).

Distribution and habitat

Australian ravens occur from the mouth of the Murchison River to Eucla and inland to the southern fringe of the Nullarbor Plain (Figure 2). The Australian raven has become one of the most common birds in the city and suburbs of Perth. Australian ravens frequent open pastures and rarely forage in heavily wooded areas. Breeding birds inhabit a territory with a nest roost tree, a water supply and a reliable source of food.

Diet

A study conducted in Perth found that over 70 per cent of the diet of the Australian raven was made up of meat, insects, fruit and bread.

These foods are available in parks, shopping centres, schools and near take-away food outlets.

Studies in rural areas have shown that Australian ravens depend on carrion, such as dead livestock and road kills. Other food items include oats (*Avena sativa*), wheat (*Triticum aestivum*), birds' eggs and nectar.

Breeding

Australian ravens do not breed until they are at least three years of age and pairs may remain together until one dies. They build a stick nest in the tallest tree in the area and lay one to six eggs in late winter and early spring. The female incubates the eggs for 19-21 days and broods the young. Nestlings remain in the nest for at least six weeks. After fledging, the young are fed by both parents for a period of up to four months. Studies in rural areas show that breeding birds produce two nestlings every year and live for seven to eight years.

Behaviour

Flocks of Australian ravens rarely exceed 30 birds and consist of non-breeding and immature Australian ravens that wander locally or move further a field in search of food. Breeding pairs are sedentary and usually remain in their territories. However, when food becomes abundant outside their territory, birds may flock to that area. For example, ravens respond to events such as lambing, grasshopper swarms, grain stubble exposure and disposal of rubbish and abattoir waste.

Damage

A survey of Perth residents found that the main problem associated with Australian ravens in the city and suburbs was the noise they make. The ravens also attack other birds, break open and scavenge in rubbish bins and damage gardens and fixtures on windows and cars. They may also represent a health risk by contaminating items with their droppings, scavenging in eating areas and depositing food items in drinking fountains, water bowls and bird baths.

In rural areas, Australian ravens are known to damage grape, almond, melon and citrus crops. Studies show that Australian ravens are inefficient predators and prefer carrion, such as dead lambs and after-birth. They sometimes kill live lambs and other young animals, but usually only if they are small, weak and/or have been deserted and would die anyway.

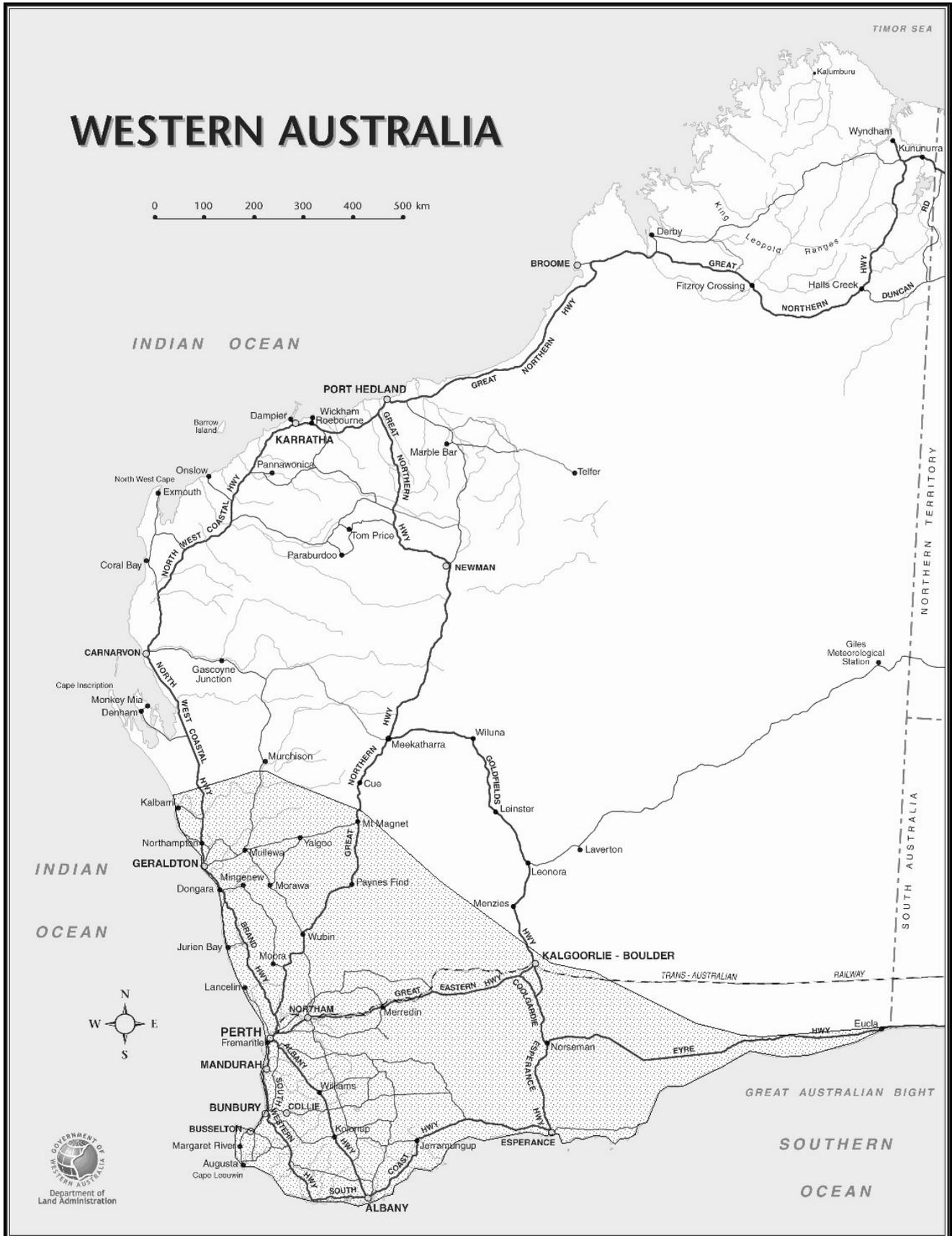


Figure 1 Distribution of the Australian raven (*Corvus coronoides*) in Western Australia (Modified from Johnstone and Storr (1998)).

Status

The Australian raven is listed as a Declared Pest of Agriculture under the provisions of the *Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act 1976*, administered by the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Food. This declaration allows for the approval and implementation of a management program in the Eucla and south-west land divisions, excluding the Perth Metropolitan area.

As a native species, the Australian raven is protected under the provisions of the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*, administered by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). Under this Act, Australian ravens can be shot on private land in accordance with an open season notice without the need to obtain a damage licence from DEC if they are causing damage to crops or stock. The area covered by the notice comprises the Eucla and south-west land divisions, excluding the Perth metropolitan area and the municipal districts of Bunbury and Mandurah.

Outside the open season area, a damage licence must be obtained from DEC prior to shooting or trapping.

Damage control

Metropolitan area

- Don't feed wild native animals or birds, or allow excess food to accumulate.
- Clear away food scraps and excess pet food.
- Dispose of fruit which has fallen from fruit trees.
- Cover compost heaps, or use a compost bin.
- Properly secure chicken pens and ensure they are in good repair.
- Deny Australian ravens access to sheds and rubbish bins.

Rural areas

For management options to reduce the damage caused by Australian ravens, see the table below. A strategy comprising a number of techniques will probably be needed to reduce the damage caused.

Destroying Australian ravens should be viewed as a last resort after other control options have been attempted.

Further reading

- Fauna note no. 2. Scaring and repelling birds to reduce damage. DEC, Western Australia.
- Fauna note no. 3. Netting to reduce bird damage. DEC,

Last updated 18 June 2009

Western Australia.

References

- Johnstone, R.E. and Storr, G.M. (1998) Handbook of Western Australian Birds. Volume 1. Non-passerines. WA Museum.
- Stewart, P.J. (1997) Some aspects of the ecology of an urban corvid: the Australian raven (*Corvus coronoides*) in metropolitan Perth. Unpublished BSc. Hons. Thesis, Edith Cowan University.
- Rowley, I. (1973) The comparative ecology of Australian corvids. II. Social organization and behaviour. *CSIRO Wildl. Res.* 18: 25-65.
- Rowley, I. (1973) The comparative ecology of Australian corvids. IV. Nesting and the rearing of young to independence. *CSIRO Wildl. Res.* 18: 91-129.
- Rowley, I. (1973) The comparative ecology of Australian corvids. V. Food. *CSIRO Wildl. Res.* 18: 131-155.
- Rowley, I. (1971) Movements and longevity of ravens in south-eastern Australia. *CSIRO Wildl. Res.* 16: 49-72.
- Rowley, I. (1969) An evaluation of predation by "crows" on young lambs. *CSIRO Wildl. Res.* 14: 153-179.

Further information

Contact your local DEC office.

See the department's website for the latest information: www.dec.wa.gov.au.

Further Information

Contact your local office of the Department of Environment and Conservation.

See the Department's website for the latest information: www.dec.wa.gov.au.



Department of
Environment and Conservation
Our environment, our future 

Disclaimer: This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Western Australia and its officers do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.